

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 143 944

CG 011 729

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TITLE Children's Expectancy of Criticism for Classroom Achievement Efforts.
PUB DATE 7 Apr 77
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New York, N.Y., April 4-8, 1977)
EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.83 HC-\$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Achievement; *Children; *Classroom Participation; Classroom Research; Communication (Thought Transfer); *Expectation; *Feedback; Motivation; *Peer Evaluation; Self Actualization; Social Relations; *Sociometric Techniques
IDENTIFIERS *Criticism

ABSTRACT

An expectancy of criticism scale was devised in order to measure children's expectations of giving criticism to and receiving criticism from different agents for public achievement efforts in class. Scores on the Children's Social Desirability Scale (CSD) and teacher ratings of amount of criticism the children received and of their participation in achievement activities were obtained. Children both gave more criticism to and expected more criticism from opposite sex peers, and also overestimated amounts of criticism they would receive from peers. Expectancy of criticism was not correlated with scores on the CSD, but was correlated with higher ratings of criticism received and lower ratings of participation in achievement activities. (Author)

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Children's Expectancy of Criticism
for
Classroom Achievement Efforts

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Paper presented at the 1977 Annual Meeting of the
American Educational Research Association

April 7, 1977

New York

Session 20.16

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A common manifestation of social comparison in elementary school children is their criticism of the achievement efforts of peers. Research has suggested that expectancy of criticism for achievement efforts is an important factor in determining the amount and kind of such efforts children make. The purpose of this study was to measure children's expectancy of criticism for public achievement behavior by means of a scale devised for this purpose and to investigate the relationship between scores on this measure and several other child characteristics that have been suggested as being related to such an expectancy.

As Dreeben (1968) describes, "Classrooms are organized around a set of core activities in which a teacher assigns tasks to pupils and evaluates and compares the quality of their work." Of necessity, some evaluations and comparisons must be unfavorable, and may be interpreted by the child as criticism for his achievement efforts. If the achievement behavior is public, he will also be subject to the covert or explicit criticism of peers. It has been suggested that a history of receiving disproportionate amounts of criticism for achievement efforts diminishes the child's achievement striving (Canavan, 1968; Katz, 1967). It has been found (Potter, 1976) that the participation of girls in classroom public discussion was predicted quite well by their reported perception that other children would be critical of their performance. Children frequently criticize and belittle the work of others. Since this experience is likely to have occurred to all children, it is necessary to look for further clues about the extent to which differences in children's expectations of such criticism is likely to be the direct result of the frequency of their experiences with it, or whether such differences are instead a reflection of different classroom norms or of personality characteristics.

If children's expectancy of criticism is based on their experiences with the level of criticism customary in their classrooms, expectancy of receiving criticism should be congruent with their classmates' expectancy of giving criticism. Children's expectancy of criticism should also be related to their history of having received criticism. An alternative explanation of expectancy of criticism levels is that they originate in personality factors that are relatively stable and more heavily influenced by parental practice. Lahaderne and Jackson (1970) found low participation to be associated with high scores on the Children's Social Desirability (CSD) Scale, a measure of concern with the good opinion of others, and Crandall (1966) found CSD scores to be related to expectancy of rejection, which may be akin to expectancy of criticism. Correlations of expectancy of criticism with the CSD would thus support the validity of "personality factor" explanation of differences in expectancy of criticism.

The present study also sought to describe sex differences in patterns of expectancy of criticism. Since cleavage by sex in social groupings is a well-established developmental phenomenon of middle childhood, it can be expected to be reflected in differences in expectancy of criticism from boys versus girls. Additional sex differences in expectancy of criticism should be found in children's expectancy of criticism from the teacher, since research into children's perceptions of authority figures (Hess & Torney, 1967; Davidson & Lang, 1960) indicates that girls feel a more positive and personalized relationship with authority figures. However, since the teacher is the manager of classroom achievement activities, all children would probably expect more criticism from her than from peers.

The following hypotheses were tested:

- 1a. Children of each sex will report that they expect more criticism for their achievement efforts from children of the opposite sex than from children of the same sex, and will also report that they give more criticism to children of the opposite sex than to those of the same sex.
- 1b. Children will expect to receive more criticism for achievement efforts from teachers than from peers; boys will expect teachers to be more critical than will girls.
2. Children will accurately predict the amount of criticism likely to be given them by same sex and opposite sex peers, with accuracy assessed by congruence with children's reports of criticism they would give to classmates of their sex.
3. Expectancy of criticism will be positively related to children's scores on the Children's Social Desirability Questionnaire (CSD).
4. Children's expectancy of receiving criticism will be related to their experience of having received criticism, assessed by teacher ratings.
5. Expectancy of criticism for achievement efforts will be associated with diminished participation in such efforts.

In order to test these hypotheses, an expectancy of criticism scale was devised. Items consisted of descriptions of achievement-related behaviors that demonstrated mild incompetence (such as being called on in class and not knowing the answer) for which the child could indicate that he expected a negative reaction, a positive reaction, or that there would be no evaluative reaction from the particular agent named in the item. Six items were used in each of five subscales, assessing the expected reactions of boys, girls, and teacher, and the child's expected reaction to a girl and to a boy classmate who display the described behavior. The examiner read the scale

aloud as the children followed and marked their answers. Order in which the subscales were completed was varied by classroom. The 30-item total scale had a split-half reliability of .832. Statistical analysis revealed no strong factor structure, and that all items were positively correlated with the total scale. Therefore, the subscales described above were retained, in keeping with the conceptualization of the study. Split-half reliability of the 6-item subscales ranged from .484 to .639.

The Children's Social Desirability Scale was then administered aloud. Teacher ratings of each child's classroom participation, attention, achievement, and criticism by herself and others were obtained in order to assess the children's experiences with criticism and their participation in achievement activities. Several of the ratings proved to be highly correlated, and factor analysis of the ratings suggested the construction of two scales, descriptively labeled, "Teacher Rating of Criticism Child Receives" and "Teacher Rating of Child Participation in Achievement Activities".

The subjects were the 120 children in the four third-fourth grade multiage classrooms in a school in a predominantly white middle-class suburban neighborhood. There were 61 boys and 59 girls, 73 third-graders and 47 fourth-graders. Children completed the subscales in their language arts class. Since classroom differences between measures were few, and in this ICE school children were grouped in a variety of ways for individual subjects, analysis of the data was done for the group as a whole, rather than by classroom.

Results

Analysis of variance of the individual measures revealed several group differences that were statistically significant, $p < .05$. As Table 1 illustrates, third graders expected more criticism from the teacher than did

fourth graders, with differences between their total expectancy of criticism scores approaching significance. Although "Teacher Rating of Criticism Child Receives" shows no significant grade difference, teachers reported giving significantly more criticism for work to third graders. There is a consistent although non-significant trend for third graders to both expect and receive more criticism than fourth graders. Their scores on "Teacher Rating of Child Participation in Achievement Activities" are significantly lower than scores of fourth graders. These findings confirm the common sense assumption that third graders suffer somewhat by comparison to more mature fourth grade classmates. Third graders' higher scores on the CSD were expected (Crandall, 1969).

An examination of sex differences on these measures (Table 2) reveals that, surprisingly, girls were not significantly higher on the Children's Social Desirability Scale. Girls had significantly higher scores on expecting criticism from boys, and boys' expectancy of criticism by girls was non-significantly higher than the scores of girls. Boys reported that they would give significantly more criticism to girls than girls would give to girls. Children were much more uniform in their reported expectancy of criticizing a boy. The lower ratings of girls on criticism received and their higher rating on participation in achievement activities approached significance.

For specific hypotheses the findings are as follows:

- 1a. Children of each sex will report that they expect more criticism for their achievement efforts from children of the opposite sex than from children of the same sex, and will also report that they give more criticism to children of the opposite sex than to

those of the same sex.

Supported

As Table 3a illustrates, girls expect significantly more criticism from boys than they do from girls, and boys expect significantly more criticism from girls than they do from boys. As Table 3b illustrates, their expectations are apparently well founded, since each sex also expects to give significantly more criticism to children of the opposite sex. These findings indicate the presence of the strong sex cleavage expected of children of this age.

- 1b. Children will expect to receive more criticism for achievement efforts from teachers than from peers; boys will expect teachers to be more critical than will girls.

Not Supported

As Tables 3c and 3d illustrate, children expect significantly more criticism from peers of both the same and the opposite sex than they do from teachers. Assessment of the accuracy of this expectation cannot be made from the present data, but the data suggests that the teacher is not the most salient classroom critic. Girls expected the teacher to be more critical than did boys (Table 2) although not significantly more so. This latter finding is in keeping with patterns of findings for research that suggests that while boys receive more criticism for misbehavior, they do not receive more criticism for the achievement behaviors discussed here.

2. Children will accurately predict the amount of criticism likely to be given them by same sex and opposite sex peers, with accuracy assessed by congruence with children's reports of criticism they would give to classmates of their sex.

Not supported

Children were not able, as a group, to accurately predict the amount of criticism likely to be given them by peers. As Tables 4a and b illustrate, children in all cases significantly overestimated the amount of criticism they would receive, as determined by children's scores on subscales indicating criticism that would be given to children of their sex. This reflects the finding that children generally reported that they expected more criticism from others than they themselves would give for the same behavior. Features of the classroom culture that would lead to such a pattern of expectations merit further investigation.

3. Expectancy of criticism will be positively related to children's scores on the Children's Social Desirability Questionnaire (CSD).

Not supported

Expectancy of criticism was not significantly correlated with scores on the CSD (Tables 5a and b). The only statistically significant correlation was for girls, whose CSD scores were positively correlated with the expectation that girls would be critical. The general absence of correlation between expectancy of criticism and CSD scores supports an explanation of expectancy of criticism that refers to a child's experiences with such criticism in his classroom, rather than a "personality factor" explanation described above.

4. Children's expectancy of receiving criticism will be related to their experience of having received criticism, as assessed by teacher ratings.

Supported

As Table 5a illustrates, "Teacher Rating of Criticism the Child Receives" was, as expected, positively correlated with the child's scores on the expectancy of criticism total scale. Children who received more crit-

icism seemed especially likely to expect to give more criticism. Table 5b illustrates that patterns of correlations between expectancy of criticism and criticism received vary by sex, with criticism received being more highly correlated with girls' expectancy of receiving criticism from girls, and boys' criticism received being more highly correlated with expecting to receive criticism from the teacher and to give criticism to other boys. A fairly consistent trend for correlations between the two measures to be positive is evident.

5. Expectancy of criticism for achievement efforts will be associated with diminished participation in such efforts.

Supported

"Teacher Rating of Child Participation in Achievement Activities" was significantly negatively correlated with children's expectancy of criticism for the total scale and several subscales (Table 5a). Again, sex differences in patterns of correlations emerge (Table 5b), but a fairly consistent trend for correlations to be negative is evident.

Discussion

The findings suggest that the construct of expectancy of criticism for public achievement efforts is a meaningful one in describing the classroom experiences of children, and that strong sex cleavages are evident in children's expecting and giving such criticism. It is also clear that, if peer reports are accurate, children overestimate the criticism they will receive from peers.

The findings suggest that classroom experience is more strongly associated with expecting criticism than is a personality factor associated with high scores on the Children's Social Desirability Scale. The findings suggest the conclusion ^{that expectancy} of criticism is related to the child's experience of

being criticized and is also associated with decreased participation in achievement activities. Rather than indicating that expectation of criticism is causally related to experience with criticism and diminished participation, interpretation of the results must be limited to the conclusion that those children who expect to receive more criticism also receive lower ratings on participation in achievement activities and higher ratings on amount of criticism received. Further experimental or longitudinal study is required in order to ascertain the presence of causal relationships that may well exist.

Several implications for practice emerge from these findings. First, teachers may be reassured, by their low rank as agents of criticism for classroom achievement efforts, that their evaluative responses are probably not excessively harsh for most pupils. In contrast, the high scores for expecting criticism and giving criticism to opposite sex peers raises the question of whether the intense sex cleavage found in the social groups of elementary school classrooms is a necessary developmental event in establishing sex role identity, or whether perhaps the teachers should attempt to modify such cleavages by manipulation of classroom grouping. In the context of the present investigation of classroom evaluation processes, it is clear that evaluation by peers is an important factor in the lives of children, and one that merits further investigation.

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Table 1

Means, standard deviations, and results of analysis of variance for effect of grade level on measures.

Measures	<u>Group</u>					
	Third grade (n=66)		Fourth grade (n=44)			
	mean	sd.	mean	sd.	f(1,108)	p(if .1 or less)
Total Expectancy of Criticism Score	10.32	5.22	8.45	4.58	3.71	.054
<u>Subscales:</u>						
Boys would criticize me	2.51	1.47	2.54	1.58	.011	--
Girls would criticize me	2.62	1.39	2.13	1.81	2.51	--
Teacher would criticize me	1.77	1.52	.95	1.40	9.28	.003**
I'd criticize a boy	1.64	1.65	1.25	1.50	1.56	--
I'd criticize a girl	1.65	1.69	1.57	1.57	.068	--
Children's Social Desirability Scale	22.01	9.26	16.95	8.03	8.74	.004**
Teacher Rating of Criticism Child Receives	6.24	2.41	5.61	2.11	1.97	--
Teacher Rating of Child Participation in Achievement Activities	8.06	2.17	9.75	2.14	16.15	<.000**

*p < .05

**p < .01

Table 2
Means, standard deviations, and results of analysis of variance for efforts of sex o1 measures.

Measures	Group		Girls (n=55)		Boys (n=55)		F(1,108)	P(1f .1 or less)
	total (n=110)		mean	sd.	mean	sd.		
Total Expectancy of Criticism Score	mean	sd.	mean	sd.	mean	sd.		
	9.57	5.04	9.09	4.97	10.05	5.10	1.01	--
<u>Subscales:</u>								
Boys would criticize me	2.56	1.51	2.89	1.44	2.24	1.51	5.408	.021*
Girls would criticize me	2.43	1.58	2.14	1.54	2.71	1.58	3.57	.058
Teacher would criticize me	1.44	1.43	1.56	1.5	1.33	1.36	.749	--
I'd criticize a boy	1.48	1.59	1.44	1.61	1.53	1.6	.089	--
I'd criticize a girl	1.62	1.64	.98	1.27	2.25	1.73	19.44	.000**
Children's Social Desirability Scale	19.99	9.1	20.33	8.40	19.65	9.82	.149	--
Teacher Rating of Criticism Child Receives	5.99	2.31	5.58	2.05	6.4	2.50	3.52	.060
Teacher Rating of Child Partici- pation in Achievement Activities	8.74	2.31	9.13	2.24	8.35	2.02	3.227	.072

*p < .05

**p < .01

Tables 3a,b,c,d

Comparison of subscales indicating expectancy of criticism from and for different agents.

Table 3a							
Group	Boys would criticize me		Girls would criticize me		t	df	P=(if .1 or less)
	mean	sd.	mean	sd.			
total (n=110)	2.56	1.51	2.43	1.58	0.70	109	—
girls (n=55)	2.89	1.44	2.14	1.54	2.86	54	.006**
boys (n=55)	2.24	1.51	2.71	1.58	2.26	54	.028*

Table 3b							
Group	I'd criticize a boy		I'd criticize a girl		t	df	p=(if .1 or less)
	mean	sd.	mean	sd.			
total (n=110)	1.48	1.59	1.62	1.64	.83	109	—
girls (n=55)	1.44	1.6	.96	1.23	2.1	54	.041*
boys (n=55)	1.53	1.60	2.25	1.72	3.32	54	.002**

Table 3c							
Group	Teacher would criticize me		Boys would criticize me		t	df	p=(if .1 or less)
	mean	sd.	mean	sd.			
total (n=110)	1.44	1.43	2.56	1.51	6.32	109	< .000**
girls (n=55)	1.56	1.5	2.89	1.44	5.22	54	< .000**
boys (n=55)	1.33	1.36	2.24	1.51	3.71	54	< .000**

Table 3d							
Group	Teacher would criticize me		Girls would criticize me		t	df	p=(if .1 or less)
	mean	sd.	mean	sd.			
total (n=110)	1.44	1.43	2.43	1.58	5.8	109	< .000**
girls (n=55)	1.56	1.5	2.14	1.54	2.86	54	.006**
boys (n=55)	1.33	1.36	2.71	1.58	5.23	54	< .000**

*p < .05 - two-tailed test

*p < .01 - two-tailed test

Tables 4a&b

Accuracy of Expected Criticism--Comparison of subscales for reported expectation of receiving criticism and reported expectation of giving criticism to peers grouped by sex.

<u>Table 4a</u>	Scores of girls Boys would criticize me		Scores of boys I'd criticize a girl		t	df	p
	mean	sd.	mean	sd.			
Accuracy of girls' expectation	2.89	1.43	2.25	1.72	2.10	54	< .05
	Scores of girls Girls would criticize me		Scores of girls I'd criticize a girl		t	df	p
	mean	sd.	mean	sd.			
	2.14	1.55	.98	1.27	5.15	54	< .000

<u>Table 4b</u>	Scores of boys Girls would criticize me		Scores of girls I'd criticize a boy		t	df	p
	mean	sd.	mean	sd.			
Accuracy of Boys' expectation	2.71	1.58	1.44	1.61	4.18	54	.001
	Scores of boys Boys would criticize me		Scores of boys I'd criticize a boy		t	df	p
	mean	sd.	mean	sd.			
	2.24	1.51	1.53	1.60	2.63	54	.011

Table 5a

Correlations between expectancy of criticism scores and other measures for total group (N=110)

Measures	Total Expectancy of Criticism Score	Subscale: Boys would criticize	Subscale: Girls would criticize	Subscale: Teacher would criticize	Subscale: I'd criticize a boy	Subscale: I'd criticize a girl
Children's Social Desirability Scale	.08	.02	.15	-.01	.11	-.03
Teacher Rating of Criticism Child Receives	.17*	.01	.12	.06	.19*	.18*
Teacher Rating of Child Participation in Achievement Activities	-.19*	.00	-.04	-.16*	-.15	-.21*
	*p= .05					
	**p= .01					

Table 5b

Correlations between expectancy of criticism scores and other measures for children grouped by sex.

Measures	Total Expectancy of Criticism Score	Subscale: Boys would criticize me	Subscale: Girls would criticize me	Subscale: Teacher would criticize me	Subscale: I'd criticize a boy	Subscale: I'd criticize a girl
Children's Social Desirability Scale	.176 (.02)	.06 (.07)	.30* (.05)	.07 (-.09)	.13 (.11)	.09 (-.09)
Teacher Ratings of Criticism Child Receives	.084 (.21)	-.022 (.10)	.26* (-.04)	-.10 (.23)*	.08 (.29)*	.16 (.11)

Table 5b (cont.)

Teacher Rating of Child Partici- pation in Achievement Activ- ities	-.16 (-.21)	.03 (-.10)	-.14 (.11)	-.09 (-.27)*	-.06 (-.23)*	-.10 (-.19)
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number not in parentheses indicates r for girls (n=55)

number in parentheses indicates r for boys (n=55)

*p= < .05

*p= < .01